

THE HAN DYNASTY

200 BCE – 200 CE



The Han Dynasty ruled China for 400 years. At this same time the Romans were building an empire around the Mediterranean Sea. The Han Dynasty was not the Golden Age of China, but life was very good for the people because of the demand for the Chinese silk and the creation of the Silk Road. The Silk Road was a trade route that went from China to Europe and back again. Products, languages and culture were shared along the route. One of the early emperors was Liu Bang. The longest ruler was Liu Che commonly known as Wu Ti who ruled from 140 BCE to 87 CE.

Much of what we know about the Han Dynasty came from the Han tombs. In these ancient tombs people buried clay models of their homes, furniture and other belongings. These artifacts told much about the early Han people.

The Han Dynasty ruled China through a large bureaucracy. Government workers were divided into different departments. Each department carried out a certain job. Each department was headed by a chief official called a minister. Han emperors wanted honest educated officials in government. For this reason they set up a series of tests to work for the government called civil service tests and the system was the civil service system. Government also set up price controls called leveling. This program set prices for grains and other products.



During the Qin Dynasty much literature and history were lost. The Han people tried to replace the literature especially the work of Confucius. The Han Dynasty ordered all boys to study Confucius. The Han Dynasty began

to create new works of literature and music. One of the emperors Wudi in 100 CE agreed with Confucius that education was the key to good government. Wudi started a system of public schools for boys. It was during the Han Dynasty that Buddhism traveled from India to China. The Chinese quickly adopted the new religion.

Han craftsmen became a very important part of society. Beautiful scrolls were created and delicate paintings were done. Craftsmen made jewelry, cast iron objects and glazed pottery. Iron was also used to make plows, and other cast iron objects. Merchants also were very important to society. A very successful merchant may be able to buy a title from the emperor and live a very wealthy life.

It was during the Han Dynasty that herbal medicine advanced and acupuncture was invented. Sciences also flourished. Paper was invented in 105 CE and also an instrument to detect an earthquake, a seismograph, was invented in 132 CE.

About 10% of the population lived in cities. Cities were laid out neatly with main streets and alleyways. A strong wall of earth surrounded the cities. These cities were the center of government, education and trade. Most marketplaces had free entertainment and musicians played drums and string instruments. The poor lived in houses packed together. They had little food and no sanitation. Gangs roamed the streets and terrorized people. The rich lived in imperial palaces. Each home was built around a central courtyard. Dinners were elaborate and houses were furnished with fine furniture. The children of the wealthy were often tutored privately.



The majority of people in the Han Dynasty were farmers. They lived in one or two story mud houses with tiled roofs. Several families often lived in one house and farmed the same farm. Compared to life in the Qin Dynasty life in the Han Dynasty had improved.

The Han Dynasty fell apart after the death of Wu Ti. China then broke up into small kingdoms.